RAIN-MAKING

Little information is available on the processes of rain-making among the Luo. Roscoe states that it is an important ceremony and is performed by a *musoga* priests who lives among the people for this purpose.(1) According to Northcote, the rain-maker is greatly esteemed, and his homestead is usually found near a big tree which is considered sacred. When rain is wanted, he gathers some herbs, puts them in a large pot of water and boils them under the tree. He draws off a little into another pot and, sucking it up through a reed, squirts it into the air, after first blowing through the reed and making the pot bubble.(2) Evans-Pritchard mentions that the Luo rain-maker is called the *son koth* and that sometimes his functions are combined with those of the *jabilo*. Rain-makers among the neighbouring Bantu seem to have a higher reputation than Luo *jakoth* and are often consulted. 789

WITCHCRAFT

Sickness is thought to be due either to the malevolence of a ghost or, more frequently, to magic worked by some envious person who wishes to bring misfortune on his victim.(3) In either case the aid of a witchdoctor is sought and he, by means of various incantations, discovers the cause and the culprit. A sorcerer may cause death by spearing the shadow of his victim, by working spells, by hiding certain objects near the house which bring sickness to the inmates. If a ghost is causing trouble the witchdoctor prescribes offerings and sacrifices necessary for appeasement. He also discovers thieves, conducts ordeals and divines the causes of events. He makes counter-magic to defend people against the activities of sorcerers and is the general prescriber of all cures. Johnston mentions a 'deeper magic' *(jamkingo)* which, among the Gemi tribe is practised by the blacksmiths.(4) 753 756 [754]

LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH

After the birth of a boy the mother stays inside the house for four days; for a girl, she stays inside for three days. The father of the child does not eat or sleep in the hut until the child begins to cut its teeth. 846

Twins are considered lucky; their arrival is attended by many ceremonies and by propitiatory dances. 845 ●

PUBERTY

Until marriage, girls help their mothers in the fields and assist them in cooking and carrying. Boys help in herding the animals. At puberty both boys and girls have their front lower teeth extracted and for four days they remain in their homes. After this period they go about visiting [857] 881 304

(1) Roscoe, *The Northern Bantu*, 1915, p.292.
(2) Northcote, *J.R.A.I.*, 1907, p.64. (3) *Ibid.*
(4) *The Uganda Protectorate*, Vol.II, 1902.

4: Hobley G-5 (ca. 1900) 1902 FL11 Luo FL11

765 worn is black. Others smear themselves with white earth. Relations in the village shave their heads three days after a death. The eldest son of the deceased sits on a stool in the road outside the village and his head is shaved by an old woman. For three days after the death of anyone of importance the villagers do not cultivate.

766 [726] If a big chief dies all the surrounding people collect at the village; even if a neighbouring clan is at war hostilities are suspended, and they attend the funeral rites of their late enemy. In the case of the death of a chief a new hut is built and the deceased is buried inside in a sitting posture; the grave is dug by a brother of the deceased. A new ox hide is placed at the bottom of the grave, and the head of the corpse is covered with a water pot. Seeds of every kind of grain grown are put into the grave; sweet potatoes are excluded. The people dance and drink *tembo* for ten days and many oxen are slaughtered. The men wail for ten days, but the women wail every morning for about a year. No one cultivates the fields for ten days.

844 846 *Birth customs.*—On the occasion of a birth, if it is a boy it is kept inside the house for four days, if it is a girl for three days. When a birth takes place the female neighbours attend, and a goat is killed for the mother and the other women. No man is allowed in the hut until three or four days have elapsed. The father of the child does not eat or sleep again in the hut until the child begins to cut its teeth. The mother does not go to cultivate for about nine days after the birth.

844 608 [304] [553] If a woman has had two children and they have both died, she will upon the birth of the third child take it out of the village on a basket-work tray and place it in the road; an old woman who has had a hint of this will go and pick it up and take it to her house, then the father of the child goes and buys it back for a goat: having recovered it the father bores the lobe of its right ear and inserts a small earring of brass wire. If the child is a boy it is henceforward called Owiti and if a girl it is called Awiti, meaning the child that has been thrown away. The old woman who picked up the child is afterwards called mother in addition to the real mother.

845 [553] [535] Twins are considered lucky, but the infants and their parents have to stay in seclusion in their hut for a whole month. Women neighbours may enter the hut but men may not. The twin born first is called Apio (the one who comes quickly). The twin born second is called Adongo (the one who is delayed). The birth of twins is signalised by dances which extend over a whole month; they are apparently of a somewhat obscene character.

582 583 *Marriage customs.*—Girls are espoused at the age of seven, and they often go to their husband's house at the age of ten or eleven. The suitor commences by making small payments to the father of the girl every month or two. When the man has paid say one cow and twenty sheep he takes the girl to his house.

585 The unmarried girls of the village take the bride to her husband's house. The father of the girl kills an ox and takes the meat and a quantity of *mtama* porridge to the man's village by way of providing a wedding feast. If the man's

10: Roscoe M-5 (ca. 1900)1915
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shave their heads, taking care to keep separate the hair which is cut off. This hair is hidden away in some place near, by preference in a rat-hole or in some hole where it is not likely to be found again. 846

Birth of twins. At the birth of twins the parents remain together in one house for ten days, and the midwife waits on them. When this time of seclusion ends, a small pot of blood is drawn from the neck of an ox, cooked and given to the parents to eat. After the meal they are escorted to the river, washed, and their heads shaved. Their house is then swept and the floor smeared with cow-dung, and friends come and dance in the village and drink beer. The mother takes the twins a round of visits which lasts several days, but she returns home each night to sleep. At each house she visits the people give her presents of grain. When the visits have been made the mother brews beer with the grain she has received in presents, and her friends again gather to dance and to drink the beer. 845 [431]

Initiation ceremonies. Children live in the same village with their parents and under their control. Until marriage they lead a free and happy life, with few wants and cares. The boys assist in herding cattle, and the girls help their mothers in their fields and also carry wood and water and assist in cooking. Their duties are light and there is no force beyond argument used to make them work. Children imitate their elders in seeking ornaments to wear and in smearing their bodies with oil and red or white paint. When they come to the age of puberty, their four front teeth in the lower jaw are extracted and they are initiated in the customs of the clan. For four days they remain in the house, after which they go about visiting their friends and receive presents of fowls. Girls go through the same ceremony as boys in having their teeth extracted, but, in addition, their bodies are scarified on the sides and back. Should there be excessive haemorrhage when teeth are extracted, the parents send to the man who has the bracelets of the deceased person after whom the boy is named and borrow them, and the youth wears them until the bleeding ceases. When the ceremony of extracting the teeth is over, the boys are sent to live in the boys' quarters 857 [302] 881 304 [431] [752] 882

11: Hartmann M-5 (ca. 1920) 1928 FL11 Luo FL11

the ear of father, mother and child. But 10 days later, on the day of the feast, the father's head is only shaven above the ear again. Those of mother and child, however, are shaven clear *(bwanyo wich)*. The feast is prepared much like for a babe-boy, but there is no *awinja*, and the performance with the ladle does not take place. Neither is the woman ornamented like after the birth of a boy; because the girl later on will not belong to that part of the country; she will be married out and live and die elsewhere. 852

If the husband has more wives, he is not entitled to conjugal rights with any of them until after the birth of a child the feast has taken place, and he has slept again with the mother of the child. If he would brake this rule, the newborn babe would waste away and die *(omiyo nyathi chira)*. 846 834

Adultery is reckoned a serious offence by both husband and wife. If the woman knows that her husband is misbehaving in this way, she will refuse cohabitation, for if she is with a child cohabitations would result in a miscarriage. If a woman commits adultery her husband may send her away, and claim the dowry he has paid for her. However, if she brings forth a child born from adultery he will reckon the child to be his own, as the woman is his, nobody else's for he has properly married her. 837 834 684 848

A widow is given in marriage to the full brother or the nearest relation of her deceased husband. If she goes to his full brother, or in case he had none, to his nearest relation, and if she begets children by him, then these children will be reckoned to be the children of her new husband. In case her deceased husband has a full brother but she does not like him, or he is still too young to take her as his wife, some other near relative will take the widow. But the children born by them will be called the children of the deceased husband. The present husband is only a borrowed one. Hence, when the girls born to them grow up and get married, the real brother of deceased husband will receive the full dowry paid for them minus one cow for each girl, which cow goes to the real father of the girl for bringing her up. 587

When the boys born by them grow up and get married they will leave the kraal and build their own apart, unless their real father helps them to get married by paying the dowry. [591]

If a woman has given birth to twins, both she and her husband are not allowed to leave the hut at all for 20 days; not even for nature's call. A hole is dug in the floor of the hut, and an old bottomless cooking pot is put over it, and this is used as a W. C. During those 20 days new beer is brewn. When the time has elapsed and the beer is ready, a bull is killed and its hide is dried for the parents of the twins to sleep on. For on that day some old woman will take away the old hide, which they used for that purpose. The relations of the woman also kill a bull and brew beer, which they bring along to the village where the twins are born. After their arrival the father and the mother with the twins sit down near the entrance of the kraal, together with an old woman who beats a drum. The visitors from the woman's home, the people of the kraal and of all the neighbourhood in turn go up to the mother of the twins, who has got some white clay *(rongo or migosi)* mixed with water in a small vessel. She dips her finger in it and 945 852 [514] [273]

11: Hartmann M-5 (ca. 1920)1928 FL11 Luo FL11

845 852 smears a little clay in front of both ears of all the people who come to the feast, and each of them do the same to the mother in return. All of them decorate their necks and waist with *bwombwe*, a creeping plant; then they start a most immodest dance; [831 786 535 scarcely covered with their goatskins they simulate the copula, and the vilest songs, which no decent person could ever listen to. After the dance they enter the kraal where food is ready. Then they have the beer. The relations of the woman stay over for the night, but all the others go home.

852 831 535 786 *Miend Kumu* is a similar dance, which is indulged in, when a woman has given birth to a child, of whose conception she did not get aware of for some considerable time. The people who come to this dance are far fewer; it does not last as long either. In stead of a bull only a goat is killed by the relations of the woman, and some beer is brewn for the feast. Other ceremonies are the same as after childbirth under usual circumstances.

Betrothal and Marriage.

584 Before any other arrangements are made, a boy intending to get married tells his parents that he wants to look out for a partner through life. If the father has any cattle towards the dowry he will agree, and tells his son to make his choice, and inform her relations. When he has found a likely girl he invites a couple of friends, one of whom at least knows the relations of the girl well [882 *(jatielo)*. With his friends he pays a visit to the kraal of the girl, and enters the *simba* i. e. the hut in which the boys of the kraal live.

No sooner have they entered the *simba* or the girls of the place go to greet the visitors, after which they bring them pipes and tobacco and go to fetch or prepare some gruel for them to drink. In the meantime the *jatielo* goes to the hut of the particular girl's father to tell him that a friend of his has come for his daughter. The father will inquire from the *jatielo* what kind of lad the boy is, whether he is of good family, whether he is not the son of a witchdoctor, whether he can pay a decent dowry, ect.

If the father agrees the *jatielo* goes back to his friends in the *simba* and reports that the father is willing, whereupon the boy proposes to the girl. There and then the girl decides whether she agrees or not. If she does not want the boy, then all is finished and visitors go home at once. If she agrees, they stay for the night. They sleep in the *simba* seperately together with the other boys and girls.

583 Then, in former years, in the early morning the visitors would catch the girl after she had left the *simba*, and take her to her fiance's village *(mako)*. On account of a government regulation, by which the dowry is now more or less fixed, this practice is no longer adhered to.

583 585 The boy and his friends go home. He informs his parents, who next day send the *jatielo* back with somebody else to pay the first instalment of the dowry, usually 2 or 3 head of cattle. They stay over the night, and in the morning they catch *(mako)* the girl, for she pretends not to like going along. After they have had some gruel to drink, the boys who brought the cattle more or less drag her out of the kraal. The girls from her village strip her absolutely naked, and the boys from there follow those who fetch the girl to take from them some of their orna-

14: Johnston G-4, 5 (no date) 1904 FL11 Luo FL11

hut until the child begins to cut its teeth. The mother does not go out to cultivate for nine days after the birth. If a woman has had two children previously who have died, she follows the same ceremony as that described among the Bantu Kavirondo. When the child has been brought back by an old woman, it is redeemed by the father, who then bores the lobe of the right ear and inserts an ear-ring of brass wire. The child is thenceforth called "Owiti," if a boy; if a girl, "Awiti," meaning "the child that has been thrown away." The old woman who picks up the child is regarded as its foster-mother. Twins are considered lucky, though their arrival is attended by a good many ceremonies and by propitiatory dances which are of an obscene nature.

437. A MEDICINE MAN FROM NYAKACH, SOUTH SIDE OF KAVIRONDO BAY

When a person *dies*, the corpse is immediately taken out of the house. If it be a woman, her brothers-in-law dig the grave in the verandah of the house. The corpse is *buried* on its left side with the hand under the head. In the case of a woman's death, her relatives and friends come and wail. Her husband presents each clan that attends with a goat. The mourners stay for three days. The hut in which a person has died is used for a month. The neighbours then meet together and drink beer, and the house is broken down. Upon the death of a man his brother digs his grave, and he is buried in the house of his first wife, if she is still living. If she is dead, he is buried in the verandah of his own house. Men only wail for one day. After that only the women wail, at first for three days, and then at dawn for fifteen days.

As a sign of *mourning* the women wear a string of banana fibre round the forehead. They also wear a black tail fringed with white strings for about a month. Others smear themselves with white earth. Relatives of

20:Ominde I-5 (ca. 1948) 1952
FL11 Luo FL11

economy by handicrafts and exchanging pots and baskets for corn.

The introduction of modern household goods of a more durable nature has lessened women's chances of earning money through weaving baskets or making pots. The overcrowding of land has also meant an increased economic dependence on men. To satisfy family demands, most women engage in some kind of business transaction which often keeps them out of the home from morning till late in the evening. Although motor transport has improved these conditions, children have been unfavourably affected through neglect during the mother's prolonged absence. This change from sedentary occupation to long-distance travel has taken place since the coming of new economic standards, and at the moment it is very rare to find a woman who does not trade in a small way.

Women and the Birth of Children

Customs and taboos. The customs and taboos observed by expectant mothers merely reflect the social attitude of Luo women to the birth of their children. Thus the aims of the customs and taboos can only be appreciated in the light of a social desire for the woman to give birth without difficulty. Fundamentally this is also a basis for the disapproval of the birth of twins, and also of abnormal deliveries.

Concerning the persistence of the marital relationship during pregnancy there is no generally accepted restriction. But while custom varies from person to person, any sexual relationship continuing after the sixth month of pregnancy is regarded as excessive. The only social stigma attached to sexual relationship continued for the greater part of this period, is that it may provoke an open rebuke from the midwives or other women. Thus while no hard

[Text continues on p. 57]

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and fast rule can be placed on the time of the temporary termination of the marital relationship, it is generally left to the good sense of the men and women concerned.

The regulation of the diet. Here again the restrictions aim mainly at minimizing the chances of the child being too big, thus rendering it easier for the mother to give birth. Among the foods which women normally eat, bananas are eliminated during pregnancy because of their supposed fattening effect upon the child, and the danger of thus causing a difficult delivery. Among the most conservative women, pumpkins are placed in the same category with the additional belief that, since their contents are mostly water, they have a weakening effect upon the child.

Sugary foodstuffs such as canes, sweets, sugary tea or coffee are among the things which expectant mothers do not eat. Women believe that these foods produce babies so fat that they put a strain on the mother's strength. For the same reason, the excessive drinking of gruel is prohibited, and hot gruel is especially avoided on the grounds that it would scald the baby. But while these restrictions are adhered to in principle, in actual practice women with a strong liking for forbidden foodstuffs do not refrain from eating them.

A factor of great psychological significance is the belief that Luo mothers begin to yield to the will of their babies long before they are born. Among them are some who, during pregnancy, develop a habit of eating dried mud and other peculiar foodstuffs, one baby causing a mother to eat these and the next turning her appetite against them. These strange habits of eating are attributed to the will of the expected child; and it is believed that the domination of the child over the mother, enduring through the early part of its life, begins in the period of pregnancy.

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deliver. A person standing behind an expectant mother may also be driven away in the fear that if that person's birth had been difficult the birth of the coming child would be equally difficult. Social regulations connected with greetings are found among the pagans and these may result from the instruction of a medicine man. Thus he may prescribe the length of time in which an expectant mother is not allowed to greet those whom she happens to meet on the road.

Although in the family circle a woman is not allowed to overwork during this period, conditions are such that, if left to themselves, they continue with very strenuous work until the time of birth. In the past, expectant mothers stored food which they ate after giving birth. These foodstuffs might be dried meat, dried fish, ghee, and corn for gruel. Nowadays the availability of fresh meat has made it possible to supply women with sufficient food even although it is very expensive.

The amount of rest given to an expectant mother depends on the husband's position in society. With the poorer families, hard work continues till the time of birth. Thus, at one time a woman called Andege took some ripe bananas to Kisumu in the morning, returned at about 2 p.m., and at 4 p.m. gave birth to her daughter, Rapuoda.

Guessing the child's sex. In guessing at the child's sex before birth, the mothers generally rely on past experience. It is recognized to be very difficult, and even impossible, to predict the sex of the first child. Certain guesses depend on the health of the mother, though such guesses are not made public. For a male child it is believed that the mother should be thin; with a female child, the reverse, and these views are probably based on the assumption that male children sap their mother's energy to a greater degree. This is likewise the basis of

20:Ominde 1-5 (ca. 1948) 1952
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as to which particular people should help her; this obligation merely rests on whomsoever happens to be present. The assistance of a midwife is required more for a first child than for those following. Anyone in the family may help the woman in an emergency; but the presence of the husband is not considered necessary unless the case is a difficult one. In a difficult labour several strong men may be required to hold the woman, but many women give birth to their babies without any assistance. The usual positions adopted are: lying on the back with knees bent, or sitting with the back supported by a tree. Some leaves serve for the mat. Older women often have their child without assistance, but it is an obligation upon everyone who finds a woman in need of help to assist her, even if she is unknown to them.

On some occasions a woman about to give birth is made to run, eventually being seated to deliver her baby. A light pressure is exerted on the shoulders. The instructions are given by midwives, who sometimes slap the woman across her face if she does not obey their orders.

After a child is born, cold water is poured over it to make it cry. If it does not cry, iron hoes are brought and a series of loud tinkling noises made as a form of persuasion. Among the pagans, tobacco smoke is sometimes puffed into the child's nose. When it has been made to utter its first cry, its head is shaped to the normal form, and while the nurse waits for the placenta, she cleans the baby's forehead with a soft leaf. Before the cord is cut it is tied with strips of dried banana leaves at three equal intervals for a girl and at four equal intervals for a boy, to indicate the length of the period of rest. The midwives used to chant a prayer, but this is now no longer heard. It is possible that this chant was a thanksgiving and a request for the newborn baby to fare well in life.

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844 in life. The women themselves seem to share a belief that neither their own efforts nor the assistance of others have much effect upon the actual delivery of children. They prefer to believe that it is some mysterious power of God which helps them to give birth to their children.

845 *Difficult labour.* Although difficult labour cases are now largely dealt with in the hospitals, the crude traditional methods are occasionally used in remote areas, and they indicate the extent to which people will go to save the lives of mothers. To the midwives a difficult labour was formerly a dreaded situation. The mothers could suffer for days, and many of them died before relief was given. If a woman died before the birth it was considered a very bad omen. A stranger had to be paid to cut her open and remove the dead child, but no relative of her own was allowed to touch her.

When there was any hope of saving the mother's life, a large number of people gathered about her, and many deaths may have occurred through over-manipulation. Sometimes as many as ten persons were engaged in operating, while others stood by giving confused advice. The group performing the operation included men as well as women. The men held the woman while the women pulled on the head of the child, which was hooked on an iron hoe.

When this was done, little attention was paid to the damage of the passage from the womb. If the woman suffered twice from such a difficult delivery, she and her husband were advised to cease having children. If the advice was not observed the midwives had a right to refuse their help.

[177] *Twins.* The birth of twins was an unwelcome experience in pre-Christianized society, but in these days it is rarely accompanied by its traditional ceremonies of lamentation. According to tradition, as soon as the loud

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cry of the midwives was heard announcing the birth of twins, the news had to be carried to the parents of the woman. This loud cry was intended to scare the evil spirits which had brought about the double birth. With it began a series of taboos on the couple as well as on the twins, the family being virtually isolated from society. For emptying their bowels a large pot was placed in a hidden corner at the back of the house. If either of the twins died during the early period it was thrown into this pot. In place of the usual clothing, the couple had creepers twined around them. The period of taboo closed with a large gathering at which a great deal of beer was drunk. At this final ceremony the dancing was rather obscene and was accompanied by foul language in reference to the couple. These proceedings lifted the taboo from the shoulders of the parents, but the twins continued to be affected until their deaths. Moreover, anything done to one of the twins had to be done to the other also, because they could not be treated as separate identities. Now the attitude has greatly changed and even among pagans these customs are no longer observed. [177]

Similarly, a birth in which the baby's legs appeared first was dreaded. This was ascribed to the work of the evil spirit.

Renewal of marital relationship. Originally it was the custom for the renewal of a marital relationship to take place on the third day following the birth of a female child, and on the fourth day after a male child. No married relatives were allowed to enter the hut to see the baby before the parents of the child renewed their marital relationship.

Although none of my informants could testify that this practice still exists, it is possible that it persists in certain places. Some of the informants pointed out that [177]